



Updated: November 11, 2011, 4:17 PM ET

No one, it seems, knows Jerry Sandusky

By Elizabeth Merrill

AMBRIDGE, Pa. -- The books were uncovered in an old box Wednesday, and Kip Richeal called to say it was OK to stop by and grab one, free of charge. It never came close to being a best-seller; it almost didn't get published; and Richeal, the co-author, never liked the title. But Jerry Sandusky insisted. He wanted the book about his life to be called "Touched."

Richeal has a quiet job selling headstones at a monument company now, but his phone has not stopped ringing for the past six days. Sandusky, legendary assistant coach and pillar of the community, has been charged with 40 counts of sexual abuse to boys in a scandal that has prompted Joe Paterno's firing and rattled the state of Pennsylvania. Sandusky's name is toxic, and his movements are tracked. On Thursday, the State College paper reported that, according to a source, Sandusky was seen shopping at a Dick's Sporting Goods wearing Penn State gear, and a nation recoiled.

AP Photo/Pennsylvania Office of Attorney General/Commonwealth Media Services Former Penn State defensive coordinator Jerry Sandusky is escorted by Pennsylvania State Police and Attorney General's Office officials Nov. 5 in State College, Pa., after being charged with sexually abusing eight boys.

Everyone wants answers, and although Richeal doesn't have them, he seems just about the only person willing to talk openly about a man he calls a close friend. The first few days after news of the charges broke last weekend, Richeal was willing to wait and reserve judgment. He *knows* Sandusky. Or, he thought he knew Sandusky. By midweek, as the sordid details continued to come to light about the retired Penn State defensive coordinator, it was obvious that good faith was eroding.

"A lot of people look at him as a monster now," Richeal said.

"I would've never, ever thought something like this about him. And how long did it go on? It never happened with me. When I met him, though, I was 18. I wasn't a little boy. If this is all true, and it looks like it's really stacking up, something took over his personality. Something changed, and it's not the Jerry I know."

The narrative was a lie. Nobody, it seems, knows Sandusky. Not the folks at the small-town Rotary clubs who heard his motivational speeches about helping people, not the children at his Second Mile charity, and certainly not the players who sweated for him at Penn State. Mention Sandusky's name, and they do a 40-yard dash in the opposite direction.

So that leaves us with Richeal. The phone rings at Steckman Memorials, and it's someone from the Jane Velez-Mitchell show. CNN and Joy Behar have called, too, and it's so odd for Richeal. He could never be an athlete. He was born with hip dysplasia, and he walks with a cane. When he was picked to be a student manager at Penn State, and Paterno introduced himself, Richeal's father was so proud.

On a back wall near Richeal's desk is an old photo of him on the sideline during a Penn State-Temple game, a slight 100-pound teenager working around towering football players. Sandusky, apparently, admired the kid's perseverance. They'd drive to watch high school football games together. Richeal feels compelled, after reading the 23-page grand jury report, to say that Sandusky never tried to touch him during those trips. Sandusky was one of the people who persuaded Richeal to go back to college after one of three hip replacement surgeries. And he was there when Richeal graduated, making the three-hour drive to Beaver, Pa., to watch him clutch his diploma.

Sometimes, Richeal has felt compelled to pick up his phone and call Sandusky, but he stops. He wants to know, and doesn't want to know. He has no idea what he'd say.

Seemingly idyllic childhood

The 1960 Washington High School yearbook reveals a strapping young man with a goofy grin who could've done anything. He's the fourth one from the left in the varsity basketball photo, with a buzz cut and a large bandage on his knee. He's on the student council and in the film club and is part of a conscientious group of teenagers who donated 10 cents apiece to help children in India.

AP Photo/Matt Rourke People view a mural where the image of Sandusky was painted over and replaced with an empty chair.

"Up until the last few days I had always thought highly of Jerry," a former schoolmate in Washington, Pa., said of Sandusky in an email to ESPN.com. "The Jerry Sandusky I knew 50 years ago was an outstanding football player, a pretty good student, and in general a very good human being.

"This hurts real bad ... "

Sandusky was an only child, raised in one of the most respected families in the town of Washington, a picturesque community of about 13,000 that is within a half-hour's drive of Pittsburgh. Art and Evie Sandusky taught their son to work hard. They often worked two jobs apiece, and they lived in a tiny apartment above the Brownson House, a recreation center that kept kids off the streets and engaged in sports. Art was Brownson House's director, an athletic man who stood about 5-foot-10 and always took time to listen to any problem; Evie worked the concession stands, coached the cheerleaders and put together plays for the children.

That old brick building is sort of a frozen snapshot of Sandusky's childhood. The tiny gym with the wooden floor is still there, and so are many of the fixtures, including a couple of outdated candy machines that crank out selections for 50 cents. In the entryway is a large framed picture of Sandusky's smiling parents. Outside, there's an old field where the children play football and lacrosse and whatever else they want. It's called Art Sandusky Field.

"Art and Evie were great people," said Dan Petrola, who replaced Art as the Brownson House director after Art retired in the mid-1980s. "I mean, he was my mentor. He taught me a lot about running activities and dealing with people. He was genuine. A very caring person. And he was very good at what he did."

Petrola, like most people these days, hesitates to say much about Jerry. He'll say that he used to drop by when he was near the area for recruiting visits and that his parents "thought the world of Jerry." He says, at least twice, that Jerry didn't work with children at the Brownson House.

Art and Evie before they died moved to State College to be close to Jerry, Petrola said. To be around family. Sandusky met his wife, Dottie, in Washington in the mid-1960s. He called her "Sarge" because she was the one in charge of the house. They adopted six kids -- Sandusky had told people they couldn't have children -- and raised five boys and one girl. A Facebook page for his daughter, Kara Sandusky Werner, revealed a profile picture of Sandusky hoisting a little girl on his shoulders. It's an old photo. His hair was brown, and his smile was wide. The page had been removed by Wednesday.

In various interviews over the years, Sandusky has said that his parents' efforts to make an impact in kids' lives helped inspire him to start The Second Mile, which began as a foster home and mushroomed into a program that has helped hundreds of thousands of kids in Pennsylvania. It also helped Sandusky have access to his alleged victims.

Petrola refuses to speculate on Sandusky's intentions.

"That's something nobody will know unless it comes out of Jerry's mouth," Petrola said.

The neighborhood outside the Brownson House has changed a lot since Sandusky's childhood. The steel mills and glass factories have been shuttered. But by nightfall, when school is out, the children arrive, and the Brownson House is bustling, just like it was when Art ran the place.

Possibilities of a dual life

Sandusky, the architect of the 1982 and '86 defenses that were driving forces behind Penn State's national championships, could be very serious on the football field but goofy and somewhat childlike off it.

That duality might help explain why Sandusky, who is accused of molesting at least eight children over the course of 15 years, could live a seemingly normal life and go so long without being suspected of wrongdoing. There is no true profile for a pedophile, said David Finkelhor, the director of the Crimes against Children Research Center at the University of New Hampshire. But, judging from what he's heard about the Sandusky case, Finkelhor said that if the allegations are true, Sandusky could fall under a subset known as socially adept preferential child molesters.

"They often genuinely like to be with children," Finkelhor said. "They are often good in organizing activities that are fun and gratifying to children. They have learned to normalize the activities that allow them to gain sexual access to children by making games out of it or providing rewards for it or providing a rationalization that makes the kids think it's OK.

"They tend to elicit a fair amount of allegiance with the children that they interact with, which makes it easier for them to escape detection."

How does a man who had a seemingly idyllic childhood and was so accomplished professionally that he was one of the most coveted coordinators in college football become a suspected child molester? Studies show that roughly half of child molesters were abused at some point in their lives, Finkelhor said. But there are a variety of other factors, too. He says some experts believe genetics, developmental experiences and prenatal issues might be involved.

"In the same way we don't know what controls sexual orientation, we don't really know where that kind of motivation comes from," Finkelhor said. "Sometimes, preferential child molesters are married. But oftentimes, you find these people who do not relate well to adult peer relationships. They prefer to relate to children."

'It's a blindside'

Sandusky, 67, was recognized by Congress. His charity was named one of President George H.W. Bush's Points of Light. He is a longtime parishioner at St. Paul's Methodist Church and is believed to be an usher, though privacy concerns preclude the Rev. Edwin Zeiders from confirming that.

Zeiders said he's known Sandusky's family for five years.

"Like anybody else in the parish, I was finding names and stories about people and then learned to rejoice in their good work," he said. "So I guess for all of us, this would be saddening and disappointing."

Maybe nobody really knew Sandusky. Former NFL coach Dick Vermeil wrote the forward in Sandusky's book. He called him "a man who has risen to the upper echelon of the coaching profession, both as a football coach and a humanitarian."

Vermeil got to know Sandusky through charity work. He did speaking engagements for him and golfed with him. He hasn't spoken to him since the scandal broke.

"It's a blindside," Vermeil said. "That's all I can say."

"If it's true, he's a sick man. He had an illness none of us knew about. That's all."

Richeal wishes it would all go away. He says his dad, who's in his 80s, is sick and distraught over it. Richeal remembers a time, in the late 1990s, when he believes Paterno lost some of his faith in Sandusky. In the old days, Paterno trusted that Sandusky's defense would close out games. But toward the end, Paterno sometimes changed up Sandusky's plans.

"I think toward the end, their relationship wasn't as good," Richeal said. "I don't know the reasons, and I didn't pry into it and ask why. But I don't think it was as good as it was."

In 1998, the first allegations against Sandusky were investigated but weren't prosecuted. Richeal refuses to speculate on whether that had any impact on the coaches' relationship or on whether it caused Sandusky to retire in 1999 at the age of 55.

Richeal was up late Wednesday night watching the events unfold on TV as Paterno was fired and students protested in the streets of State College. He can't believe what is going on at the school, his school. He can't believe much of anything anymore.

Elizabeth Merrill is a senior writer for ESPN.com. She can be reached at merrill2323@hotmail.com.